

APPROVED AS AMENDED BY THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

**TOWN OF DARIEN
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SEPTEMBER 19, 2005**

ATTENDANCE: Linda Santarella, Acting 1st Selectwoman; Joseph Miceli; Robert Harrel, Jr.; Barbara Thorne. Absent: Evonne Klein.

STAFF: John Crary, Administrative Officer.

OTHERS: Mallory Walsh; Cailin Walters; Jack Ault; Cathy Coe; Mr. Windells; Kathy Capsomalis

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Santarella, as Acting 1st Selectwoman, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

1ST SELECTWOMAN'S REPORT

Ms. Evonne M. Klein, 1st Selectwoman, was absent due to illness.

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

Mr. Crary reported that there have been some concerns regarding fuel oil costs. He said that it doesn't make sense to try to lock in fuel oil prices because they were so variable and that the results of Hurricane Katrina has made results more difficult and more expensive. He said they are working at it and hopefully will figure out a way to get pricing for gasoline and diesel oil after February 1st that makes sense. Ms. Thorne asked if he would be working with the school on that as well. Mr. Crary said they are working with the school on fuel oil. He said he is also working with a consortium on the same thing, and from his prospective, whoever comes forward first with the best situation will be who they go with. He suggested that they track mileage for employees in a log book. Mr. Crary said he had asked staff to put together a mechanism to reduce energy use, increase conservation and reduce their use of diesel and other fuels to whatever extent possible, as well as electricity. He presented a draft of a memo that will be going out to all employees within the next two weeks. He also suggested the use of stickers on the light switches at Town Hall reminding people to turn off lights which would send a message to the public when they enter the building. Also, they can set the temperatures to 67 degrees in winter and 72 degrees in summer although he said the temperatures can change from room to room as the building's controls are not that good. Ms. Thorne said that they may have to make an exception for the Senior Center as the elderly feel the cold more easily.

SENIOR CENTER TASK FORCE REPORT

There will be a preliminary report on December 15th including a recommendation and gross budget.

He said they are looking at a new building and alternative site or they could consider rehabilitating the existing building. There are no existing program changes, as the way the programs are determined is through a very intense community effort through newspaper articles, opinions from people from a survey standpoint, and they have been asking for input by letter and through their website. The final gross estimates and numbers may or may not be a unanimous recommendation.

Ms. Santarella said the meetings are being held on Wednesday afternoons at 3:00 p.m. at the Senior Center and all are welcome to attend. She said the task force is working very cooperatively with one another.

NEW BUSINESS

a) Depot Report

Ms. Santarella introduced Mrs. Janice Wilshire who had been nominated Citizen of the Year and congratulated her. Mrs. Wilshire was accompanied by the President, Mallory Walsh, and President, Cailin Waters, who wished to address the Board.

Ms. Walsh said they wanted to inform the Board of what has been happening at The Depot. They held a car wash which raised money for events and to send to the hurricane victims which was very successful. She noted both the Police and Fire Departments brought vehicles to be washed. Ms. Waters said there was an upcoming pasta dinner and football dinner. She noted many Homecoming events planned for October, including sports teams, skits, and the Best of the Best which will be held on October 13th. The Fall Dinner will be held on October 28th.

b) Meet with RTM District and Committee chairs and representatives

Ms. Santarella recognized Mr. Cameron, representing PZ&H on behalf of Mrs. Grimes. Mr. Cameron stated he had a brief report to update the Board on highlights of things that had been addressed last year and others to look forward to in the upcoming year. The United Way headquarters lease has been approved; acceptance of the donation of funds for the turf replacement at the high school; approved renegotiation for the Noroton Heights train station; input in the Town Plans and the revisiting of the Boat Club lease. In addition, last year funding was approved for the School Building Committee. Mr. Cameron said they have also been working with Jeremy Ginzberg on the revision of the Town Plans.

Ms. Santarella asked how the Town Plans were coming along. Mr. Cameron said he hasn't seen a lot of progress but hasn't spoken with Mr. Ginzberg about it. He said he has given it some input on transportation issues but he doesn't know what the status is at the moment.

Ms. Joan Davis said she hadn't been prepared to give a report but wanted the Board to know that the seniors feel they don't really see a need for a new facility.

Ms. Santarella said that as a member of the Senior Center Task Force she was aware that seniors don't really want to ask for anything and that the seniors she has been dealing with don't ask for

much. Ms. Santarella said it will take a lot of leadership with RTM committees and other people to support what the Task Force is going to recommend. She said the Task Force could recommend one, two, or three different things, but yes it was true that the seniors at the Center wanted to stay right there, that's what they have been told. She said the Task Force will be speaking to the Board about taking the programs that are presently there and looking at additional programs and offerings, applying that information to the present site to see if and how it fits. Ms. Santarella said there are many other seniors who would like more to be offered, so the Task Force is trying to listen to what everyone is requesting in order to determine what is best to be done.

Mr. Harrel said that the building is insufficient and in need of significant repairs. He noted that the entrance is difficult for many seniors. Ms. Santarella said that Mr. McLaughlin reported to Mrs. Klein that the opening went very smoothly.

Ms. Thorne said she was very grateful that the Senior Task Force was looking not only at the present senior center occupants and their needs but is reaching out to seniors who possibly haven't been to the center or who haven't heard what is being done. She said she could also report personally that the opening of school was fine and the building was amazing and is working very well. She said she had taken a tour of the building on the Friday before school opened and she commended the Building Committee for doing an outstanding job.

The Chairman of the Education Committee reported that it was an excellent beginning to the year with a high participation. She said there were at least two or three people at every Board of Education meeting, a major accomplishment. She reported the Tokeneke project was going very well. There will be another meeting in October and a report going to the Board of Education at the end of October. She said that some members want information on Board of Education subcommittee meetings and that one or two people have been attending and they have a good handle on things now. She also noted that, in regards to the upcoming election, in District One there is a lack of candidates and she is the only person who is on the ballot. She said that District Four has seven out of eight candidates.

The Vice Chair of District Two, Janet Grogan, said she had very little to report. She said that people have come to her and asked the town to stop building so many big houses; people are concerned with the sewers, asking why are they being put in when no one wants them.

Mr. Harrel said the cost of the sewer can't exceed the benefit; if people have to replace the sewers it is easier, and noted that there are large homes that use more water than smaller homes.

Ms. Thorne said she had received some phone calls about the sewers and she has talked with DPW. She said there have been public hearings and meetings with the people who are involved. She said the survey work has to be done regardless of what kind of decision is made about the type of sewer, but people would be given the best choices to consider for each particular house. She stated that people's comments are being listened to, although when people don't receive the answer they're looking for they ask the question again and again, but they are being listened to.

Mr. Bayne of District Three said things were going very well, there is a full slate of candidates and even an extra RTM seat this year. He said there were not going to be any vacancies. He reported that people are getting a growing sense of unease about class size and it seemed that a number of classes are bumping up on the Board of Education guidelines year after year, with twenty-three, twenty-four second, third and fourth graders running around one teacher and it was a little hectic at times. He said people are starting to become concerned at what might happen ten years down the line if there are such large class sizes now, there is worry that the children aren't getting the attention they need. There is concern about what is going to happen with the Proccoccini property, the district knows it has been purchased and they are afraid there will be a large development there, and the question is how will that impact things as there is already a crowded street which will only get worse if they get sixteen or more houses up there. There are a lot of questions about what the age-restricted housing is going to be and how it will be defined, but they don't know exactly what the parameters are. Mr. Bayne said if they can't sell it as an age-restricted housing complex with the prices the developer wants, how is the town going to enforce it, how can they restrict it? How is it going to impact Noroton Heights Fire Department, they already have the busiest section of town. He said the whole development of the Proccoccini property is raising a host of questions and problems.

Mr. Harrel said the leverage there would come from zoning and it was zoned for one-acre lots, anything other than one-acre house lots is an exception. He said multi-family lots are not automatic. Mr. Bayne said that if they get up to sixteen houses in there it will affect parking. Ms. Santarella said the property was not in District Three, it was in District Five. Mr. Bayne agreed but District Three is right around the corner and during rush hour it is already crazy on Route 106, if a large development was added it would only add to the traffic problems already in place.

Mr. Bayne said he also wanted to thank the Board for their support in the dredging of Turtle Pond, which would be completed that week. He also wanted to say that, on the issue of obtaining petition signatures for people running for the RTM, many people have said to him, what is the RTM, what is the Board of Selectmen, what is the Board of Finance, how do these Boards act? He said that people in the town don't understand the way the town government is set up. He suggested that as elected officials they all have to do a better job of explaining how Town Hall works and what are the functions and the inter-relations between the various boards. He indicated that this confusion might explain the low turnouts during elections. Ms. Santarella asked him how he would do that, and said there was a booklet in Town Hall explaining all the departments and Boards that had been sent to every household. She said people get involved when a school is going to be closed or it hits them close to home, it has to be an issue that makes people rise to the occasion. Mr. Cameron suggested that when the meetings are broadcast on Cablevision, it might get more people interested in how the Town Hall functions.

Ms. Santarella responded to Mr. Bayne's comments about class size and recommended the subject be brought up to the Board of Education, the PTOs, the Council of Darien School Parents, and others. She felt the Board of Education was probably aware that class size was increasing. Mr. Bayne said he had mentioned it because people have told him that the Board of Selectmen is the Board that people listen to. Ms. Santarella said the Board does not pontificate

to the Board of Education regarding class size policy. Mr. Bayne said he understood but thought it was a situation that should be brought to their attention.

The Chairman of Parks & Recreation reported that a subcommittee has been working together for over a year to study the Diller site. She said they have not come up with any definite use for the Diller site as there are wetlands to be considered and they are trying to determine how much space there they can actually use. She said that since money is so tight in the Parks & Recreation Dept., they can't hire an architect or anyone to form a real plan for it. She said they are also attempting to get the neighbors together to form a "Friends of Diller Park" organization, which was discussed at today's meeting but they have not been approached yet. She said the Parks & Recreation Dept. has been receiving complaints that the school fields are not in condition. These fields come under the Board of Education, which apparently some people in the town don't understand so they complain to Parks & Recreation and there is some confusion in the town as to who takes responsibility for which field and who maintains what. She said they are also working on the Weed Master Plan, which is coming along. There has been input with Stearns & Wheeler and information has been sent to their email address. The budget process will begin soon in Parks & Recreation, and the only comment she had about the budget process was that the RTM really doesn't have much to say because Parks & Recreation doesn't get organized until at least December, and the Board of Selectmen has to have the budget in by December. Since they have a new committee that won't be elected until November, by the time they get organized at the next meeting, the budget is basically done so it's hard for them to have input into the budget for Parks & Recreation ahead of time. She said she tries to get input from her committee by this time of the year but it's difficult and she stated it would be nice if the Board of Selectmen could push the budget time up a little further.

Ms. Santarella asked if there were any other committee chairs that wished to speak. She thanked the committee chairs for their participation.

c) Update on the Talmadge Hill bus parking matter – Paul Strassmann

Mr. Jack Ault spoke on behalf of Mr. Strassman. He said they have been working with the issue of bus parking at Talmadge Hill and are aware that it is an historic area with great open space. He wanted to express gratitude to the Board for supporting them. He said they were able to work with the Town of New Canaan on Wednesday and that things were still in the works. He said it was great open space that should be enjoyed by all and they are trying to preserve it and keep it as such a nice place. A brief discussion followed about the history of Talmadge Hill and the suggestion that a historic district could be created within the area. Ms. Thorne thanked Mr. Ault for his participation and for keeping the Board informed.

d) Discuss proposed ordinance previously adopted by the Board of Selectmen to exempt from property taxation certain motor vehicles for people with disabilities

Mr. Crary said that this was approved by the Board of Selectmen back in 2003. He said that the process was that it had to go back to the Board of Finance and then on to the RTM. He said that he reviewed the minutes of the Board of Finance in 2003 and apparently it had been tabled until such time as the Emergency Services Worker Tax Abatement was resolved. He wanted to bring

it before the Board so they were aware of what the situation was, and then have the Board of Finance revisit it. He said there are less than five people involved. Ms. Santarella agreed and suggested the Board move it forward to the Board of Finance.

e) Discuss implementation of the Health Insurance for emergency volunteer program

Mr. Crary said they have prepared a process they think will work and shared it with members of the Board of Selectmen over the weekend. He said it was a three-page sheet that shows the types of things they would expect and that people such as volunteer firemen or Post 53 would have to sign up in order to get health insurance through the town's program. He said the next step would be to share this with Wayne Fox and ask him to review it and make sure there was nothing in it needing any modifications, but he was sure that Mr. Fox would come up with a few things. He said it should be ready in two or three weeks at the most the Board should be in a position to begin meeting with the Fire Departments and Post 53 for any member who was interested in participating in the program. Once they have people lined up individually and in a group they can begin the paperwork. His expectation is that with the process they would be able to begin offering health insurance to the town's volunteer firemen or Post 53 for those who are willing to pay for it, beginning February 1st. Unless anything comes up which forces it to be altered, this will be the expectation. He stated the Board has already approved it so this was just an update.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Cameron stated he had three very brief items. His first question was how was the flu shot program going to work this year. Mr. Crary said they did not know at this time. Mr. Cameron said his second item was just an observation. He said he didn't know what it meant, but the parking at the train station seemed to be down. He said the private lot near the Darien train station was half empty; the permit lot in Noroton Heights that is usually filled at 7:30 in the morning was only two thirds full; he doesn't know where all the cars are going but ridership on Metro North is up 6%, especially now with the rise of gas prices. He suggested they keep an eye on this. He said the Commuter Council will be meeting tomorrow night and maybe he can get some answers then from Metro North. He said the revenue from parking may be down and he doesn't know why. Mr. Cameron's last item was, he served on the town Website Committee last spring and made a number of recommendations which were endorsed by the Board of Selectmen to improve the town website, things such as having all the email addresses for everyone in town committees listed. He said the Board endorsed that but he doesn't see any changes on the website so far and was concerned.

Mr. Crary said that in answer to Mr. Cameron's question about the train station parking, he had received numbers in either the August or September meeting and the numbers were fine, there was nothing unusual about them. He said they get monthly figures, which show total gross revenues are about \$28,000 and net was about \$23,000 and that was above their historical average, so from a financial point of view he didn't see any problems. Ms. Santarella thought it might have had something to do with it just being summer.

Mr. Crary said that regarding the website, the Board did endorse the recommendations that Mr. Cameron's committee put together. He said the first meeting of the Website Committee was

October 4th and for the most part would consist of department heads and other people involved in putting the library's webmaster in, and from the Board's perspective, they are just starting now. He said they have to learn how to walk before they run, they haven't ever administered the website at all, they were going through a learning process. He said they intend to address all the issues over time, but they were just starting out now.

Ms. Kathy Capsomalis said she was the owner of Cox Pond, one of the six ponds being dredged. She said that 60% of the material taken from Cox Pond was road sand and she would like to be compensated for the cost of dredging. She said she has written letters to the town that have been ignored; sent a sand sample; a video; photos; and has sent a bill.

Ms. Santarella asked Ms. Capsomalis to be sure the Board gets good copies of her information and they will put the item at the top of the next meeting agenda to be discussed. Dr. Miceli asked if the pond was tied into the storm drain system. Mr. Windells said this was the second time the pond has been dredged and this was an anomaly; the first time the pond was dredged it was almost entirely organic material. Ms. Santarella asked that the Board get all the information and it will be on the next agenda.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Regular meeting of August 29, 2005

- ** MR. HARREL MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 29, 2005 MEETING AS WRITTEN.**
- ** DR. MICELI SECONDED.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Regular meeting of September 6, 2005

- ** DR. MICELI MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 6, 2005 MEETING AS WRITTEN.**
- ** MR. HARREL SECONDED.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Ms. Santarella noted that the October 3, 2005 Joint Town Meeting Department Heads Meeting scheduled for 4:30 p.m. has been changed to 4:00 p.m. at Ms. Klein's request. There were no changes to any of the other scheduled meetings at this time.

OTHER BUSINESS

(A two-thirds majority vote is required to add an item to the agenda)

There was no other business to discuss before the Board.

**** MR. HARREL MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**
**** DR. MICELI SECONDED.**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda J. Hayes
Telesco Secretarial Services